

From: Ross Dunn [<mailto:rossdunn@mac.com>]
Sent: Tuesday, November 17, 2015 12:43 PM
To: HSSframework
Cc: Tom Adams
Subject: To IQC: Comment on HSS draft Framework

To: Instructional Quality Commission
California Department of Education
From: Ross E. Dunn
Professor Emeritus of History, San Diego State University

November 17, 2015

Having reviewed the draft Framework for History – Social Science in grades six and seven, I would like to make a few critical comments. I should also mention that Nancy McTygue appointed me to serve on a committee back in 2009 to review and revise the Framework course descriptions, including development of essays for grades six, seven, and ten titled “Global Overview.” In the past two years I have also reviewed and committed on the world history course descriptions again, and I drafted the material on questions and themes that has been Appendix H of the draft Framework. I submitted quite extensive comments on the grades six and seven course descriptions to Nancy McTygue and Bill Honig. I will attach those two files.

1) For grade six world history I recommended substantial changes to the questions that have been embedded in the course descriptions. I did not do this for grades seven and ten owing to the time involved and the fact that I was unsure of how the subject committee and the IQC might respond to my suggested edits for grade six. I have eagerly supported the idea of embedding analytical questions in the course descriptions. The great concern I have about the questions is that they do not on the whole support the commitment the Framework makes over and over again to development of historical thinking skills. Most of the questions are very general, descriptive interrogatives aimed, we believe, to indicate material that students ought to “cover” in the Framework units. I believe that the great majority of the questions in all three world history grades have little classroom utility. They are highly generalized, indeterminate, descriptive rather than analytical, and very wide in the subject matter they address. We had understood that the idea of embedding questions, which might be relatively broad, that is, not calling for fact recitation, would nonetheless address concrete historical developments. I expected questions that asked students to query specific issues of causation, consequence, and significance and that encouraged teachers and students to interrogate and analyze evidence. Very few of the dozens questions inserted into the course descriptions serve well as the starting point of any specific inquiry. I anticipated that the questions would model for teachers exemplary analytical questions that might produce engaging classroom discussion and activity.

Take the example of the very first question in grade 6: “How did the environment influence human migration, ancient ways of life, and the development of societies?” The question encompasses so much potential subject matter that it cannot serve as the basis for specific classroom inquiry. Also, here, and in the case of many other questions, “the environment” is introduced as a general covering term rather than as a specific conceptual tool linked to a question that might elicit specific analytical discussion. What will teachers and

students think "the environment" means? What can they do with such a nebulous question as "How did the environment influence . . . the development of societies?" Here is my suggestion for a substitute question: "What factors in the earth's physical and natural environment and in the technologies that humans possessed allow our species to successfully occupy all of the world's major land masses, something none of our hominin ancestors accomplished?" This question requires that students think about a concrete historical problem and consider evidence to explain it. All the questions should, in my mind, do something like that. In grade seven a typical question reads: "How did the environment affect the development and expansion of the Persian Empire, Muslim empires, and cities? What impact did this expansion have on the environment?" How would students address a question of such vague generality? They and their teachers would certainly have to break it into many analytically manageable questions in order to develop thinking skills. What is the point of loading the Framework with questions that can have no specific classroom use? I think that the IQC is missing a huge opportunity to model for teachers good examples of questions that tax student's critical skills and that can be the foundation for class activities.

Please see my attached revisions (in Word tracking) of most of the questions for grade 6.

2) I was also deeply disappointed that the Global Overviews, which both the CDE office and the IQC subject committee seemed to think were a strong innovation designed to connect the individual unit descriptions to large-scale global patterns of change (an idea supported by plenty of research), have been essentially eliminated in grades 7 and 10 though retained in grade 6. Some of the language from the Global Overviews in 7 and 10 has been incorporated in the latest draft, but the idea of an introductory section that presents the "big picture" of the millennia or centuries addressed at that grade level has been truncated in those two grades. I have no idea why the Global Overview still appears in grade six but no longer in grades seven and ten. I hope that this innovation might be restored, at least for the sake of consistency.

3) A third concern is that the grade 7 guidelines have incorporated quantities of material from the Sites of Encounter in the Medieval World teacher resource. Sites of Encounter is indeed a fine resource. But inserting this material, in some places in considerable detail, into the course descriptions rather than offering Sites of Encounter as a recommended resource, verges on transforming the course descriptions into a *syllabus* with directives to teachers to address lots of material about particular cities and countries, for example, medieval Baghdad, Cairo, and Sicily. Teachers are in effect instructed to teach about these places even though the rationale for studying them is not explained and though the regional or world historical context for understanding the significance of those places is not made clear.

4) In general I find places in grades six, seven, and ten where the history is misleading or inaccurate. I believe these course descriptions should all be subjected to meticulous examination by well-qualified and world history-oriented scholars and teachers, including people like Bob Bain at the University of Michigan who understand how to design good analytical questions.

I would like to add that I have also examined closely and commented on in the two attachments the sections in grades six and seven on Islam and India and made suggestions for changes. I believe that changes recommended by Eberoi and the Hindu-American Foundation are

for the most part very sound indeed. My main disagreement with Eberoi is over the origins of the Indo-European languages with particular reference to South Asia. But I believe the text revisions I have proposed are acceptable to them.

Sincerely,

Ross E. Dunn

Ross E Dunn

rossdunn@mac.com

1-619-895-3841

Professor Emeritus

San Diego State University

Associate Director

National Center for History in the Schools (UCLA)

Project Director

World History for Us All

<http://worldhistoryforusall.sdsu.edu>